allocation, and urged upon them to scale back subsidies and align prices with the market; and

(b) if so, what is Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in its recent annual publication "Asian Development Outlook" has made certain observations on the subsidy mechanism operated by the Government of India/public sector oil companies in respect of petroleum products.

PDS kerosene and domestic LPG are subsidized products. In addition to Government subsidy, public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs) have been sharing the burden by not passing the full increase in the international prices in the domestic consumer prices of these products.

The pricing mechanism for petroleum products including PDS Kerosene and Domestic LPG during 2004-05 has attempted to balance the interests of various stakeholders, *viz.*, Consumers, Government and Oil Companies. As of now, the Government have decided that the budgetary subsidy on PDS Kerosene and domestic LPG are available upto 31st March, 2007. Scaling back of subsidies on kerosene and domestic LPG, which are products of mass consumption even in the rural areas, is not being considered at present. It may be noted in this context that the ADB report also mentions that the subsidies on kerosene and LPG discourage the use of firewood for cooking and lighting. This has positiive impact on the environment.

Estimated oil and gas reserves in the country

4283. SHRI CHO. S. RAMASWAMY: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) the estimated reserves of oil and gas in the country as per the surveys conducted in the country so far;

(b) what steps are being taken to increase the local production of crude and gas in the country;

(c) whether Government are considering to give more exploration permits for crude and gas production in the country; and

(d) if so, how many such sites have been identified and what will be the quantity of crude and gas likely to be produced through such ventures?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRIMANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) The in-place hydrocarbon reserves are 5576.6 Million Metric Tonnes (MMT) of oil and 2328.51 Billion Cubic Metres (BCM) of gas as on 1.4.2004. The reserve estimation for 2004-05 is under finalisation.

(b)For exploration of hydrocarbons, Government have taken the following steps:—

(i) New areas for further exploration have been opened up under the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP). Under NELP, 90 exploration blocks have been awarded to various companies in four rounds of exploratory bidding held till now. The exploration work in NELP blocks has led to 13 oil/gas discoveries so far. 20 more exploration blocks have been offered for international competitive bidding under the fifth round of NELP.

(ii) Acceleration exploration programme by National Oil Companies (NOCs) in areas awarded to them on a nomination basis.

(c)and (d) On 4 January, 2005, the Government of India announced the fifth round of the New Exploration Licensing Policy (NELP), under which 20 exploration blocks have been offered. The bid closing date for these blocks is 31 May, 2005. The details of the blocks on offer is annexed as Statement [Refer to the Statement appended to the Answer to Unstarred Question 4277 part (a)]. Oil and gas production from these blocks would depend upon the result of exploration carried out by the companies after the award of the blocks.

Petroleum and gas reserves

4284. SHRI SHAHID SIDDIQUI: Will the Minister of PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS be pleased to state:

(a) the names of States where petroleum and natural gas were found in last three years;

(b) what is the estimated quantity of crude petroleum in the country; and

(c) whether there is a possibility of petroleum and gas reserves in the Himalayan range?

THE MINISTER OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL GAS (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) During the last three years (2002-03 to 2004-05),